



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Final Report
December 2, 2010

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The New York State Inspector General found that Douglas Teetsel, a former Highway Maintenance Worker employed by the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT), misappropriated nine DOT snowplow blade tips from a scrap metal pile at the DOT Tannersville Sub-Residency. Teetsel was arrested by the Inspector General and the New York State Police on a charge of petit larceny; he has resigned from his position with DOT.

In light of the instant investigation and several similar thefts, the Inspector General recommended that DOT periodically instruct its employees that removal of salvaged material from scrap metal piles is unlawful and against DOT policy.

ALLEGATION

The Inspector General received a referral from DOT of a complaint alleging that Douglas Teetsel was in possession of approximately six DOT snowplow blade tips and had offered to sell them to another individual.

SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION

Teetsel had been employed as a Highway Maintenance Worker 1 with DOT since December 13, 2007, assigned to the Tannersville Sub-Residency. Teetsel's duties primarily included road maintenance, plowing snow, and greasing equipment.

DOT accumulates scrap metal at its facilities which is periodically auctioned, with the money earned remitted to the state. Among other metals, used snowplow blade parts, including Carbide blade tips, curb shoes, and wing shoes are deposited into a scrap metal pile when no longer deployable. Property that is no longer of use to the state must be disposed of in accordance with DOT policy (Code 2.04-7.1, *et seq.*) and the requirements of State Finance Law § 167. Accordingly, DOT policy strictly prohibits the removal of state property "from State premises without proper authorization" (Code 2.4-6-1).

Another DOT policy entitled “Theft” (Code 4.15-3) states that “theft in the workplace is a serious matter and will not be tolerated.” The policy specifically provides that “even property that is perceived to be ‘valueless’ to the State (e.g., scrap metal, wood, surplus equipment) may not be taken without proper prior approval.” According to DOT policy, “theft” includes not only the taking of equipment but also the “improper use, removal and/or disposition of State property or material.”

The Inspector General interviewed Teetsel’s supervisors and co-workers about the alleged thefts. None reported knowledge of the matter or that Teetsel had been given permission to remove scrap metal from the facility. All reported that it is well known at the sub-residency that metal cannot be taken from the scrap pile for personal use.

The Inspector General interviewed Teetsel under oath. Teetsel admitted taking approximately nine used snowplow blade tips, shoes or wings from the sub-residency scrap pile almost a year earlier. Teetsel further testified that he brought the blades to a nearby relative’s farm using his personal truck and planned to use the equipment on his tractor. In the presence of the Inspector General, Teetsel then recovered the snowplow blade tips, wings and shoes from his relative’s property and offered to return them to DOT. Teetsel claimed to be unaware that removing items from the scrap metal pile was forbidden and maintained that two supervisors had granted him permission. Both supervisors disclaimed this assertion in sworn testimony to the Inspector General.

The Inspector General, in coordination with the State Police, arrested Teetsel on March 30, 2010, and charged him with petit larceny.¹ On May 12, 2010, the Village of Tannersville Court issued an Adjournment in Contemplation of a Dismissal on the charges and, a day later, Teetsel resigned from DOT, effective immediately. Prior to his resignation, Teetsel returned the snowplow blade tips, wings and shoes to DOT.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Inspector General established that Douglas Teetsel, a DOT Highway Maintenance Worker, misappropriated nine DOT snowplow blade tips from a scrap metal pile at the DOT Tannersville Sub-Residency. Teetsel was arrested by the Inspector General and the State Police on a charge of petit larceny. The court ordered an Adjournment in Contemplation of a Dismissal on May 12, 2010, and on the next day, Teetsel resigned his position with DOT.

Because the Inspector General has issued similar reports pertaining to misappropriations from DOT scrap piles, the Inspector General recommended that DOT periodically instruct its employees that removal of salvaged material from scrap metal piles is unlawful and against DOT policy.

¹ New York State Penal Law § 155.25.

In response, DOT advised the Inspector General that it routinely reminds employees of scrap and theft policies, and that, as recommended, it will issue a reminder to all supervisors to ensure staff are aware of the policies.